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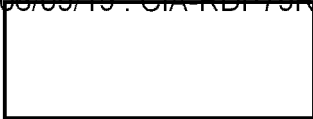
SPECIAL MEMORANDUM

Moscow and the Fedayeen

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MORI/CDF Pages 1, 3-10

20 November 1968
No. 23-68



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

20 November 1968

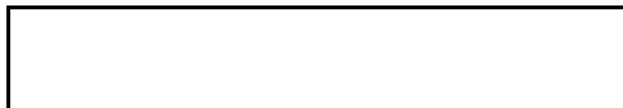
SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 23-68

SUBJECT: Moscow and the Fedayeen*

The Soviets, who have hitherto been careful to deal with the Arab fedayeen only through the intermediary of established Arab governments, now seem to be undertaking some direct contacts. At this stage it is impossible to discern either the lengths to which Moscow might go to forge links with the fedayeen or the degree to which Soviet officials are differentiating among the various groups. Nevertheless, there are a number of reasons why the Soviets probably feel compelled to provide some evidence of their support for fedayeen operations.

1. Until quite recently, Moscow has fought shy of any direct contact with the leaders of the Arab guerrilla forces. Yasir Arafat, the leader of Fatah, the best known and seemingly

* This memorandum was prepared by the Office of National Estimates. It was discussed with representatives of the Office of Current Intelligence and of the Clandestine Services, who are in general agreement with its judgments.



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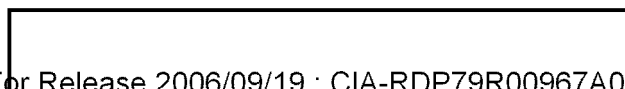
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most effective of the fedayeen groups, had to seek Nasser's personal intervention last July in order to gain a hearing in Moscow. Arafat was seeking Soviet weapons and evidently was promised some, but deliveries were to be made only through Cairo and other Arab governments. In addition, he was anxious to convince the Soviets that the anti-fedayeen policy of Arab Communist parties hurt the Arab resistance movement.

2. On the other hand, Soviet commentary since about March has periodically seemed sympathetic to Arab "resistance" and "liberation" activities in the Israeli occupied areas, although Moscow has been conveniently ignoring or even distorting the fact that the fedayeen reject any idea of a peaceful settlement with Israel. Moreover, the Soviets now seem to be on the verge of providing some direct arms aid, at least on a small scale, to one or more fedayeen organizations. Soviet officials in the Middle East have agreed to send on to Moscow a list of arms requirements submitted by the Palestine Liberation Organization*. Since the Soviets seem to have encouraged the

* The PLO has two military affiliates: the Palestine Liberation Army, made up of conventional forces assigned as units in other Arab armies and the Palestine Liberation Forces, consisting of a handful of commando units. The arms the PLO has requested from the Soviets were described as being needed by the PLF.

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[REDACTED]

PLO request, they presumably intend to make some sort of positive response. At the same time, the USSR is pumping the PLO for information both on the organization and operation of the various commando groups and on fedayeen contacts and relations with the Chinese. Some of the questions asked suggest that Moscow is very poorly informed about the various Arab irregular armies -- a melange of groups likely to change name, loyalty, and membership at any moment.

3. In some ways, Moscow's choice of the PLO as a contact and potential arms recipient is rather curious. The PLO, established in 1964, was recognized by the Arab League as the official representative of the Palestinian people in Arab councils. Nevertheless, it has since lost most of its prestige and cohesion through its own divisiveness and its propensity for grandiose pronouncements that not even Arabs could swallow.

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[REDACTED] the PLO itself remains far less popular than Fatah. From the Soviet point of view however, the PLO's weaknesses may make it more attractive than Fatah as the initial target for an attempt to gain influence

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and information. In comparison with Fatah, the PLO seems more susceptible to political intrigue and more in need of military and financial aid from non-Arab sources. The PLO is also the Palestinian group with the longest record of involvement with the Chinese. And, other than Fatah, it is the only large organization that is not linked to a particular Arab political faction.

4. If Moscow were seeking control and influence over the Palestinian organization with the best potential for future political strength, Fatah would seem a far better choice. By virtue of accepting aid from all donors while eschewing any involvement in politics, Fatah is making itself a force to be reckoned with. As far as we know, Fatah continues to pay for its arms and to receive them only through recognized Arab governments. It may be that Moscow intends to establish a more direct link with Fatah at some point.

5. The future of Jordan, and the role fedayeen might play in determining that future, must present particularly snarled considerations for the leaders in the Kremlin. They must recognize that the departure of Husayn, whatever the

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circumstances, would probably set off a struggle for power. The role of the fedayeen, either as active participants or as a major issue between opposing domestic political groups, would be an important factor in any such dispute. Turmoil in Jordan would severely tempt other Arab states to intervene and perhaps to seize Jordanian territory. A Syrian or Iraqi move into the area around Irbid, within artillery range of Israel proper, is one of the contingencies that might well precipitate an Israeli drive to conquer those heights. Thus a change of government in Jordan could be the source of another Arab-Israeli clash or perhaps the spark for armed conflict between certain of the Arab states.

6. Moscow could hardly view either of those prospects with equanimity. At this juncture, therefore, Moscow probably has no desire to incite or even condone a fedayeen challenge to Husayn's throne. Instead, the Soviets can be expected to continue trying to win Husayn's gratitude and confidence with repeated offers of arms and frequent gestures of diplomatic support. That attitude toward the King, however, would not necessarily deter the USSR from moving carefully to expand its contacts with the fedayeen groups.

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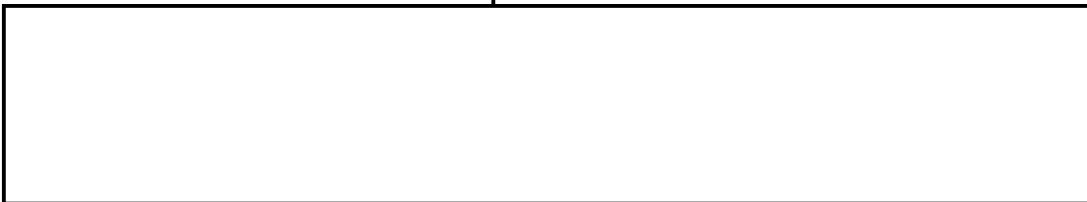
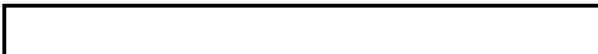
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7. As yet, the Soviets do not appear to have any comprehensive policy toward the fedayeen. Over the longer run it will depend on fluctuations in the prospects for an Arab-Israeli settlement. If the existing stalemate drags on, we would expect the assets, strength, and popularity of the fedayeen groups to increase further; under those circumstances, the Soviets would probably see increasing advantage in associating themselves with the fedayeen cause.

8. In their propaganda treatment of fedayeen activities, it seems likely that the Soviets are seeking to respond at least as much to popular currents in the Arab world as to pleas from fedayeen leaders.

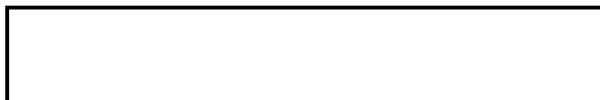
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in any other way. Thus, the past policy of silence from Moscow and outright disapproval from most Arab Communist parties probably is not a useful policy for the Soviets. Indeed, at this stage of the Arab-Israeli confrontation, support for the Arabs probably seems to Moscow to demand at least some support for the fedayeen.

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9. Moscow's continuing rivalry with Communist China provides additional motivation for verbal support and for some direct contact with the fedayeen leaders. The Chinese have been enthusiastic supporters of the Arab resistance groups for a number of years, even according some Palestinian representatives quasi-diplomatic status in Peking. Almost all the important fedayeen groups have sent batches of recruits to China for guerrilla training, and the Chinese have given arms, ammunition, and equipment to various fedayeen organizations. Chinese radios and newspapers have lauded the Arab freedom fighters without reservation, and Chinese journalists in the Middle East have attended meetings of the guerrilla organizations as observers. Even if Moscow has some doubts about its own ability to gain significant influence over the fractious, unpredictable Palestinians, it probably has decided that the field cannot be left to the Chinese by default.

10. In the immediate future, some minor arms aid to the fedayeen probably will be forthcoming, but Moscow is likely to continue providing the majority of such assistance through intermediaries. In sum, by giving minor evidence of support

- 7 -

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for the fedayeen, Moscow seems to be covering its bets, allowing for the chance that the fedayeen might somehow, some day, exert actual political control somewhere. Furthermore, Moscow has probably come to recognize that the fedayeen will be an important factor in any continuing attempt to reach and implement a settlement of the Arab-Israeli impasse. The Soviets are, therefore, seeking information on this potentially critical aspect of the Arab scene. They may be attempting to lay a basis for exerting some measure of control over the paramilitary exploits of the fedayeen, either to counsel restraint or to urge specific actions.

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